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MX: PEACE KEEPER OR TROUBLE MAKER?

JOHN M. FISHER

President Reagan has set in motion a chain of events that will undoubtedly lead to this year's most acrimonious national security debate in the U.S. Congress.

Not since Congress debated deployment of the anti-ballistic missile defense system in 1969 has a major nuclear weapons system sought by a president encountered such intense opposition as the MX "Peacekeeper" missile.

The Congress approved deployment of the first 21 MX missiles in 1983. A year later, Congress approved funding for an additional 21 missiles, but delayed release of the funds until receipt of an arms control report from President Reagan. On March 4, Mr. Reagan formally asked that Congress release the funds, setting the stage for the current debate.

Anti-defense lobbyists and lawmakers consistently attack the MX as being part of a "massive defense buildup." They never mention that President Reagan's actual and projected military spending for fiscal years 1982-86 comes to $40 billion less than the amount planned by President Carter's administration for the same period. In addition, while Mr. Carter wanted 200 MX missiles, Mr. Reagan has cut that request in half. While the MX will cost $11 billion spread over the next four years, this is less than 1/3 of 1 percent of the 1985 federal budget per year.

The last four presidents, the last four secretaries of defense, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff for more than 12 years, have urged modernization of our ICBM force by building the MX.

The latest U.S. land-based missile rolled off the assembly line in 1970, but Soviet production has never stopped. Today 75 percent of Soviet strategic weapons are less than 5 years old, while 75 percent of U.S. strategic weapons are 15 or older. Missiles, like planes and submarines, deteriorate over time and become less dependable. Time also makes their technology obsolete. The Soviets know this, and have a continuing program of replacing their old missiles with new ones. The Russians now have in place more than 600 missiles that are more powerful than the MX. In fact, they deployed more MX-type warheads in one year, between 1982 and 1983, than the United States plans to deploy in the entire MX program.

While the U.S. Congress still debates the MX missile, the B-1 bomber, and the Trident submarine, the Soviets have *30* new strategic weapons systems in various stages of development, production, and deployment.

Today the Soviet advantage allows them to target six warheads on each of our ICBM silos, which is about three times more than would be needed. But the Defense Intelligence Agency estimates that the Soviet superhardened silos can withstand a direct hit from our most powerful Minuteman IIIs. The MX would be the only missile in our arsenal which could threaten those Soviet silos.

Thus, the MX missile would reduce the growing Soviet temptation for a nuclear first strike or for nuclear blackmail, because it gives us a genuine, meaningful capacity to retaliate against some of the Soviets' remaining missiles and command bunkers.

The opposition the anti-defense lobby has generated on Capitol Hill is certainly not reflected by the attitudes of the American people. In early February, the respected polling firm of Cambridge Reports completed a nationwide public survey for the American Security Council that showed popular support for the MX by a 53 to 28 percent margin. The same survey also showed that by 60 to 33 percent the people felt we should continue to produce the MX "so that we can resume arms reduction talks with the Soviets from a position of strength."

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John M. Fisher is president of the American Security Council, a national pro-defense organization.